Chapter IV

New Directions: Recommendations for Change

The discussions, research and consultations of the Regional Needs Assessment yielded a set of common themes and positive models which will be useful in guiding future improvements in surface water funding and decision-making:

- To be effective, planning and decision-making must take into account the unique characteristics of each watershed or basin.

- Simple, flexible organizational frameworks are needed to deal with surface water issues, not additional bureaucracy or new governmental units. We need to more clearly identify responsibilities and create frameworks for cooperation.

- All jurisdictions, key interests, and others affected by policies within a watershed need to be included in the process.

- We need approaches which increase opportunities for stakeholder ownership and involvement in problem-solving actions.

- We need to move beyond a regional vs. local attitude, working as a consortium rather than as "separate powers."

Throughout these recommendations, a number of new approaches to surface water funding are suggested. It is important to recognize that none of these ideas for new or reallocated funding raise enough money to pay for all our surface water needs. But they do constitute a reasonable beginning, an opportunity to take immediate action on obvious priority areas and collectively target additional funding. Through Waterways 2000 we have seen the benefit of providing funds to directly improve the physical environment . . . and to assist and empower citizen efforts. By taking action

now to assure starter funding for critical surface water issues, we are more likely to develop community priorities and support for raising future financial resources.

With these themes in mind, RNA recommends the following governance and funding policies.

Recommendation 1:

Acknowledge that certain services are best handled individually by local governments; other services are better provided through coordinated approaches:

A: Drainage and conveyance services are the responsibility of each individual jurisdiction. But where drainage crosses jurisdictional boundaries or impacts downstream flows, coordination must occur between the affected jurisdictions.

B: Fish habitat, water quality and river flooding issues generally need to be coordinated across jurisdictional lines to successfully set priorities and determine who should carry out solutions.

The list of surface water management services traditionally provided by local jurisdictions is long and varied. The number and range of services provided by each jurisdiction generally increases with the size of the jurisdiction. Given the increasing number of jurisdictions and the shrinking King County Surface Water Management service area, a closer look at "who provides what" was needed.

These considerations led the RNA to ask stormwater managers to look at current and prospective services and ask:

- Which services could best be provided locally?

- Which services could benefit from cooperation with others (in watershed groupings or other interlocal arrangements)?

- Which services require a degree of expertise not within the staffing capabilities of most local governments?

The "Local or Coordinated Services?" chart on the following page summarizes the results of these deliberations. It shows the areas where local governments would hold responsibility for service delivery, where they might require external technical assistance (from other local or regional governments or from the private sector), and areas where coordinated approaches to service delivery are desirable.

Local service delivery

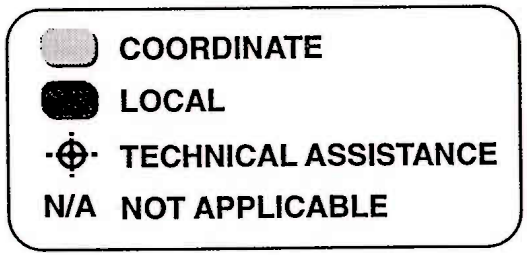
Individual cities felt strongly that they are most responsive to the drainage needs of their local constituents, so management of drainage and conveyance should remain the responsibility of each individual jurisdiction.

Examples of important activities to continue at the local level include:

- Construction and maintenance of capital improvements to local drainage and conveyance systems
- Adoption and updating of ordinances for drainage, sensitive areas, and grading/clearing
- Collection and maintenance of geographic data bases specific to their local areas
- Education and stewardship
- Regulatory enforcement

There are many options available to cities to carry out these local responsibilities: using city staff, obtaining services from other jurisdictions or the private sector, or teaming with one or more jurisdictions to obtain desired services or equipment. For instance, Burien and other newer cities are

Local or Coordinated Services?



	Drainage & Conveyance	River Flooding Prevention	Fish Resources	Water Quality
Policy & Planning	C	C	C	C
Monitoring	L	C	C	C
Response to State & Fed. Regs	N/A	N/A	C	C
Regulatory Development	⊕	C	C	C
Regulatory Enforcement	L	⊕	⊕	⊕
Tax and Other Incentives	N/A	N/A	C	C
Education & Stewardship	L	⊕	⊕	⊕
Operations & Maintenance	L	C	⊕	⊕
Capital Facilities				
- Design & Construct	L	C	⊕	⊕
- Funding	L	C	C	C

currently working together on a format for contracting out surface water management services.

City stormwater managers cited the following starter list of local services which are good candidates for contracting out or teaming:

- Inventory of current drainage systems (as built)
- GPS surveying
- Routine maintenance (catch basins, oil/water separators, etc.)
- Maintenance inspection of private facilities
- Vactor waste
- Group purchase of equipment
- Generic school/public education materials

Opportunities for coordination and cooperation

Water from one jurisdiction often flows into another or impacts downstream flows. When it does, coordination is essential, not optional. Also, many jurisdictions lack the technical expertise to deal independently with the broad array of surface water issues facing them.

RNA participants cited many areas where cooperative efforts among jurisdictions would be beneficial. Examples include:

- Assistance in meeting National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) requirements
- Design assistance on fish habitat restoration projects
- Technical assistance on regulatory enforcement
- Stream and lake stewardship programs
- Coordination of plans and sensitive areas ordinances
- Technical assistance with bank stabilization techniques to reduce maintenance needs and enhance fish habitat
- Joint applications for federal and state flood hazard reduction funds
- Establishing goals, objectives and priorities for fish protection
- Water quality testing

- Hydrologic modeling
- Stream gauging

For some activities, informal one-on-one collaboration would suffice; but with so many areas requiring coordination, informal efforts can soon become ineffective and burdensome. Identification of an overall collaborative mechanism therefore becomes essential, as outlined in the following recommendation.

Recommendation 2:

Manage collaboratively by watershed.

Once governments agree on areas where coordination is needed for effective surface water management, the next step is to identify how that coordination will occur. The most sensible mechanism appears to be managing collaboratively within each watershed.

Why watersheds?

Watersheds are critical to the protection and enhancement of King County's water resources. Watersheds are the functional unit of the landscape: they transcend political boundaries as the organizing principle for effective surface water management. In King County, all land, lakes, rivers, streams and wetlands drain into Puget Sound. On a large geographic scale, King County is part of a watershed that is shared with multiple entities to the north, south and west. At the opposite end of the scale, every property and parcel in King County is part of a small neighborhood drainage basin or watershed.

A watershed-based approach to surface water management makes both ecological and political sense. It brings together the people who best know their own basin and its needs, and encourages consideration of the unique features in each watershed. It flows naturally from the Countywide Planning Policies, which acknowledge the need for a system which crosses jurisdiction

boundaries to accommodate growth and protect the natural and built environment.

And while the RNA has dealt only with surface water management issues, a watershed-based approach would make it easier to manage for multiple beneficial uses including groundwater quality and quantity, as encouraged by the Countywide Planning Policies..

By maximizing collaboration on a watershed basis, we can cut the time and money spent by overlapping institutional layers. We can increase efficiency, and leverage funding opportunities through cooperative ventures, information sharing and economies of scale. Citizens and elected officials alike would be reassured by the knowledge that limited local and regional funds are being spent wisely on agreed-upon priorities.

Equally important, the watershed approach capitalizes on initiatives already underway. It has the capability to inspire future participation and partnerships in a way no other broad-based system can. Increasingly, in all important public arenas we are discovering that the best solutions arise when we look to private/public coalitions, rather than to either sector working in isolation.

By bringing together neighbors, development and other business interests, tribal representatives, environmental groups, local and regional governments and others with interests in the watershed, we can help ensure effective action rather than seemingly endless planning, hostility and confrontation. We can increase opportunities to mobilize local support for, and action on, priority issues. We also improve our collective ability to negotiate with federal and state agencies on issues important to each watershed.

Recommendation 3:

Divide the County into six watersheds.

Every watershed is made up of multiple basins with small drainage streams. These waters flow together to form larger basins, eventually becoming a

complex watershed. The following six watersheds are nominated by the RNA as potential functional units for surface water management (examples of potential sub-watersheds are listed under each major watershed):

- **Green/Duwamish River Watershed**
  (from West Point in the northwest to Duwamish Head in the southwest, including Elliott Bay)
  Potential sub-watersheds:
  - Duwamish/Elliott Bay
  - Lower Green River
  - Middle Green River
  - Upper Green River

- **Cedar River/Lake Washington Watershed**
  Potential sub-watersheds:
  - Cedar River with Seattle watershed
  - Lake Washington

- **Lake Sammamish/Sammamish River Watershed**
  Potential sub-watersheds:
  - Lake Sammamish with Issaquah
  - Sammamish River with Bear/Evans Creek

- **Snoqualmie/Skykomish Rivers Watershed**
  Potential sub-watersheds:
  - Skykomish River
  - Lower Snoqualmie with Tolt watershed
  - Upper Snoqualmie River

- **White River (including Hylebos basin) Watershed**
  Potential sub-watersheds:
  - White River
  - Hylebos Creek

- **Puget Sound Direct Drainage**
  (Excluding the West Point to Duwamish Head drainage)
  Potential sub-watersheds:
  - Vashon Island
  - North Puget Sound
  - South Puget Sound

Recommendation 4:

Create watershed forums and sub-watershed workgroups

An effective organizational framework should integrate surface water management and natural resource protection needs across the linked drainage basins which make up the whole watershed. Simultaneously it must focus attention on the unique management concerns of each particular watershed. It is important, therefore, that each watershed's organization be tailored to its own issues and players.

Watershed forum guidelines

To remain flexible and to take advantage of currently active efforts, RNA suggests the following principles to guide the establishment, membership and activities of watershed forums:

Watershed forums should be established in at least four of the six watersheds. No forum was proposed for the Puget Sound drainages because each flows directly into Puget Sound and is not otherwise related to other drainages. However, several cities within those drainage areas have expressed interest in assembling at least an informal forum; such interest should be explored. No forum is proposed for the White River, since most of the watershed lies within Pierce County, which would therefore be the more appropriate government to take the lead.

- Forums need to empower the community at large with its diverse membership to take a strong role in managing the watersheds. Therefore, the forums should be designed as inclusive organizations in which community, major landowners, environmental interests, and businesses regularly come together with local government, special district officials and representatives of regional, state, federal and tribal governments.

- Forums should be constituted as bodies with influence so their deliberations carry weight within the watershed. The primary focus of the forums and workgroups should be on inter-jurisdictional issues and activities. Their purpose is not to usurp the work being done by local jurisdictions. Instead, their role is to provide a meeting place for broad-based discussion of needs, so that agreement can be reached on where to make expenditures and how best to fund them.

- Watershed forums should:
  Set goals and strategies for surface water management issues in their watershed, encompassing fish, water quality and flooding.
  Sort out overlaps and conflicts.
  Agree to take action on the more pressing issues.
  Develop funding sources for priority projects and to continue forum coordination.
  Encourage interlocal agreements between local jurisdictions.
  Seek technical assistance and funding from external sources.
  Share information with other watersheds.

- Elected officials from each jurisdiction in the watershed need to participate at the macro level in watershed forums, but not necessarily at the micro level in sub-watershed workgroups.

- Elected officials need to decide who should be represented at the table when watershed forums organize. To get started, it is suggested that the following temporary convenors assemble elected officials for initial consultations:
  --Green/Duwamish: Tukwila
  --Cedar/Lake Washington: Renton

--Sammamish: Redmond
--Skykomish/Snoqualmie: King County
--Puget Sound (exploratory): Federal Way

- Each forum and workgroup should have the flexibility to determine what issues and problems should be addressed, what priorities need to be established, and what activities and projects can be coordinated or be implemented jointly.

- Each forum and especially the sub-watershed workgroups should incorporate public involvement from watershed communities and individual citizens as they identify problems and set priorities for action.

- Each watershed forum should report annually to the Regional Water Quality Committee (see below) on its status and progress, detailing topics such as actions taken, results achieved, priorities set or adjusted, and collaborative ventures undertaken.

Sub-watershed workgroups

Specific watershed management issues should be coordinated at the lowest possible level required to bring together all the players needed to solve the problem. The nature of the issue will determine which jurisdictions and stakeholders need to be at the table. This may mean two or three jurisdictions within a creek basin or it may mean every jurisdiction within the watershed.

For example, the Green River Flood Control Zone District will continue to be the appropriate forum for discussion of flood control issues in the lower Green River, and the jurisdictions which lie in the Mill Creek drainage basin will continue to be the appropriate players for discussing management issues within that area. For drainage issues where the cause and solution lie totally within one jurisdiction, no coordination with other jurisdictions is needed.

Recommendation 5:

Designate the Regional Water Quality Committee (RWQC) as the regional policy focal point for watershed-based management.

Important as establishing a watershed-based management system is, there must be a regional focal point to help establish cross-watershed priorities and deal with technical and other issues which may affect all watersheds.

There are currently three committees which bring together elected representatives both from the county and the cities, and which were therefore considered as candidate policy focal points. They are the Growth Management Planning Council (GMPC), the Regional Policy Committee (RPC), and the Regional Water Quality Committee (RWQC).

The RWQC was created as part of the merger of Metro and King County to help assure that cities would continue to be involved in addressing water quality policy issues. As such, it makes sense that it should be the central forum for discussion of surface water management issues which cross jurisdictional and watershed boundaries.

The RWQC should be responsible for keeping track of countywide progress in managing surface water and establishing countywide policies as needed. It should also be responsible for recommending allocations of regional funds to the watersheds. To ensure that all watersheds are fairly represented, jurisdictions should consider geographic representation across watersheds as a criterion when appointing members to the RWQC.

To assist the RWQC in understanding what is occurring in watersheds and to foster a regional view of the issues arising from the watersheds, each watershed forum should submit an annual "state of the watershed" report to the RWQC. In preparing for these annual reports, it may be useful for the forums to share information in advance, to identify and discuss common and conflicting issues.

To further foster its cross-watershed understanding, the RWQC may also find it useful to appoint ad hoc task forces from time to time to advise on important technical issues.

Recommendation 6:

Fish are a regional resource. Additional regional funds need to be provided to protect and restore fish habitat

The fish in our lakes, streams and rivers are a valuable regional resource. While local efforts to preserve and enhance declining fish runs in each jurisdiction and watershed are essential, a county-wide view of the whole resource is the only way to assure that the most critical needs are being funded.

$5 Million Regional Fish Fund

A regionwide funding source should be established to provide fish habitat restoration/protection grants to watersheds, guided by principles established by the Regional Water Quality Committee, with advice from technical experts and citizen stewardship groups. This Regional Fish Fund (RFF) would provide approximately $5 million in grants each year for habitat restoration, land acquisition and protection as well as special projects or studies, depending upon what each Watershed Forum requests, based on their priorities. It would also fund a grant administrator.

Allocation of funds

The areas most in need of habitat protection are not always the areas with adequate tax base to support these efforts. Yet taxpayers are understandably reluctant to see their tax dollars spent outside their immediate area unless the need is clearly established.

Therefore, a two-phase allocation approach is envisioned:

- For the first two years, 80% of the RFF funds should be returned to fund projects in the watershed where the money was raised. The remaining 20% would be available to fund the most needed projects wherever they were located.

- After the first two years, funding of projects would shift to needs-based criteria across watersheds. These criteria would be developed by the RWQC in concert with forum representatives and technical assistance as needed.

Potential sources of funds

Any new (or reallocated) funding source has sensitivities, yet all options need to be considered. A combination of sources should be considered if no one option is deemed fully feasible. More detail on all funding options, including advantages and disadvantages, is contained in the Financing Options Appendix.

Options include:

- Increase the King Conservation District (KCD) assessment (and/or use some of the $1.25 assessment to "jump start" the Regional Fish Fund--see Recommendation 8 below). At the maximum assessment of $5 per parcel maximum, this assessment would provide $2.67 million each year, at least $2.1 million of which could be available for the RFF with the remainder funding KCD operations at current levels (see Financing Options Appendix for more detail).

- Reallocate existing surface water management revenues from county and cities to RFF priorities. Generating $5 million would mean an across-the-board reduction of almost 11% in operating expenditures or 14% in

capital expenditures for all jurisdictions. Alternatively, funds from Metro or water utilities could be redirected for fish or water quality purposes.

- Create a region-wide surface water management charge. Generating $5 million per year under the current SWM fee structure, based on amount of impervious surface, would require about $1.66 per residential parcel and $15.45 per commercial/industrial acre. Some have suggested that since the purpose of this charge would be to protect fish habitat, the base of taxpayers should be expanded to include agricultural and forest landowners as well. If that were to occur, fees would decrease because of the expanded taxpayer base.

- Collect an excess property tax levy or issue debt. Generating $5 million would mean the owner of a $150,000 home would pay an average of $4.50 to $5 per year, depending on the method chosen.

Recommendation 7:

Benefiting watersheds should provide funding support for construction and maintenance of flood hazard reduction projects. Expenditures of County River Improvement Fund Levy revenues should focus on services with more regional benefits.

Historically, flood hazard reduction efforts on the major rivers (Green, Cedar, Snoqualmie, Skykomish, Sammamish and White) have been funded primarily by countywide funding sources. The current arrangements for service provision result from the County's role in constructing capital projects during the late 1960's and 1970's funded by bonds issued earlier.

Maintenance of these facilities has largely been funded by the Countywide River Improvement Fund (RIF) levy, a countywide property tax levy in both unincorporated and incorporated areas which generates approximately $1.9 million annually. Because it is collected on the basis of assessed value, more of the revenue is collected from urban areas than rural areas where many of the flood hazard reduction services are provided.

But needs greatly exceed the $1.9 million yearly funding capacity of the levy. The county is able to maintain only a fraction of its facilities on an annual basis. In addition, the 1993 King County Flood Hazard Reduction Plan identified more than $300 million in capital needs, of which $72 million are classified as high priority. New capital projects have only been possible when federal and state grants have been available.

Some local areas have begun to help fund projects which benefit them. In the Lower Green River Basin, the jurisdictions who directly benefit from flood control facilities set up a flood control zone district in 1990 to support river facility and pump plant maintenance. However, other areas of the county continue to rely on funds from the RIF (approximately $500,000 per year) to maintain and repair their flood and erosion control facilities.

Flood prevention funding recommendation

All watersheds should fund maintenance of river facilities and projects where benefits are limited to their own watershed. Such local funding could be from one or more sources, such as a flood control zone district or a surface water management fee.

Countywide (RIF) funding should be reserved for flood hazard reduction services or projects of regional consequence, with generalized or multiple benefits such as improving fish habitat and/or increasing open space.

Examples of regional services include:

- Joint applications for federal and state flood hazard reduction funds and a local match reserve fund

- Acquisition of flood-prone properties where there are significant open space or fish habitat benefits

- Development of new technologies for river facility maintenance and construction which will reduce both public expenditures for repairs and impacts on fish habitat
- Coordinated and improved flood warning systems and flood hazard education
- Updated mapping and modeling to more accurately reflect flood hazards
- Technical assistance and grants for bank stabilization projects that reduce maintenance needs and enhance fish habitat
- County-coordinated application to FEMA to qualify all county residents for reduced flood insurance premiums
- Coordination of flood hazard reduction efforts with other surface water management activities such as fish habitat enhancement, wetlands management, and stormwater management, to achieve multiple benefits

Recommendation 8:

Provide short term funding to get started on the RNA recommendations.

No matter which funding mechanism were chosen to fund the Regional Fish Fund, it would probably not be in place until 1997. Similarly, it would likely take several years for the watershed forums to become established and decide whether and how to raise additional watershed-based funds. Getting started would, therefore, require up-front, interim funding and other resources. Suggested funding sources are:

King County should provide staff support for watershed forum startup for 1996 through 1998.

The county would fund a three-year transition to watershed-based management by providing staff support for the four principal watersheds developing forums: the Green, Sammamish, Cedar/Lake Washington and

Snoqualmie. A watershed coordinator would work with governments and key stakeholders to establish a tailored forum approach for each of the four watersheds. The Puget Sound Drainages may be considering creating a less structured forum, staff coordination for which should be provided by the member cities.

Startup assistance would also include basin stewards to serve as community focal points, building networks and connecting volunteers with on-the-ground project opportunities. A biologist would also be available to assist watershed forums with setting goals and priorities. A pool of experts, including a hydrologist, a geologist and a water quality specialist would provide additional technical watershed assistance.

This interim watershed funding would be provided by King County Surface Water Management Division at the level of approximately $1.5 million per year for three years. By the end of that time, it is envisioned that watershed forums would be up and running, the Regional Fish Fund would be in place and making its first grants, and sources for continued watershed funding for the forums and other projects would be agreed upon.

An RWQC review should be conducted by mid-1998 to assure that all of these outcomes are occurring and the transition to watershed-based and watershed-funded management is successful. If not, then a decision to stop the watershed management experiment should be considered.

King Conservation District assessment should be extended for one more year to assure quick start up of Regional Fish Fund

The current authorization to charge a $1.25 per parcel assessment to fund the King Conservation District expires this year. The same charge should be authorized for one more year during transition to the Regional Fish Fund:

- Fund the District at current staffing level for 1996.

- Contribute to the RFF the $170,000 previously used to pay off an operating loan.

- In addition, ask the cities to consider contributing their share of the assessment ($220,000) to the RFF. The total RFF start-up contribution for 1996 could then amount to $390,000.

- Use the first year's RFF start-up funds to award multiple, small, on-the-ground community action grants throughout the watersheds.

After 1996 the new RFF funding source should be in place and the King Conservation District's assessment could be discontinued. It is assumed that the KCD could continue to seek funding for its projects from a variety of outside sources, including working with the watershed forums to request RFF grants.

Cities should continue to contribute staff to watershed forums and workgroups

During the RNA project, stormwater managers and other city staff have actively contributed their time and expertise. Key to the success of the watershed management approach is the expectation that such support will continue. Support would include assistance to elected officials who sit on the watershed forums and participation in workgroups at the sub-watershed level.

Chapter V

Appendix

The following RNA background reports are available upon request. Please call King County Surface Water Management Division at 296-6519.

A. Organizational Alternatives

B. Financing Options

C. A Snapshot of Community and Cooperative Activities in King County Watersheds

D. Draft RNA Discussion Document, October '94

E. Draft Decision Document: Drainage and Conveyance, April '95

F. Summary of Water Quality Task Force

G. Summary of Fish Habitat Task Force

H. Summary of Flood Hazard Reduction Funding Task Force

I. Summary of Stakeholder Roundtable Comments and Participants

J. Watershed Challenges: Background Reports (one report for each watershed; available September '95)

K. List of RNA Participants

Chapter VI

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